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*I knew from
my education
in counseling
and critical
incident stress
that when
somebody just
keeps talking,
talking is healing.
Getting it out
is a big deal.*

”

received, they called and asked if they could put my name on a list for people to come up. I said, ‘Yes.’ They said they were going to be doing this for months, maybe years, so they said, ‘We don’t know when or if you’ll get a call back, we are just looking for people who are CISM trained.’ Then I got a call a few days later and they said, ‘When can you come?’

With three young children at home, how did your family react to you traveling to New York City in a time of such uncertainty?

Once I got asked to come, there was so much, ‘Hurry up, you gotta get going,’ and that kind of thing more so than, ‘We’re going to sit around and philosophize about this thing.’

Tell me about arriving in New York City and what you were there to do.

When I got there, the first thing they did was make you an ID. They had their little lamination machine there and they made my ID, and it was still warm in my hand from being out of the machine when somebody came in and said, ‘We need somebody to go work at the morgue, who is our fresh meat here?’ And I was it. I jumped in a cruiser with this NYPD lieutenant and he took me down to their outdoor morgue. I swear, it looked like something from the Civil War. It was just in between two buildings and it was tents next to Bellevue Hospital. He said, ‘Here you go.’ I opened the door to get out and realized he was still rolling, he never stopped. I just jumped out and he was gone. I didn’t know how I was going to get picked up, who I called, I had nothing. At that time, we still didn’t have cell phone service in that area, so it was just like, here we go. That was within 45 minutes of my arrival.

So, I was down there at the morgue and I helped tag body parts and load them into body bags then into refrigerated trucks. I never saw a complete body — I never saw anything larger than a torso. I spent four or five hours doing that, then somebody came looking for me. And, I never went back to the morgue again. I thought I was going to be there all

night long. The next day I started working at the site and I worked there most of the time.

The first thing they did with everybody there was take you on a tour so you would get your bearings and kind of know where you are, how to get out, how to get in — because there was so much rubble, there weren’t clear pathways or streets anymore. On this tour, they needed you to just go ahead and let your jaw hit the ground and say, ‘Oh my God.’ And just stand there for awhile and take it in, rather than try to put you right to work. Because you’re going to do that at some point. It just looked like some giant had stepped right in the middle of Manhattan. It changed every day because of the amount of debris that was moved out. The whole thing morphed and was just a little bit different all the time. It never just had the same look to it. They called it the pile then, it was always 40-feet high or more while I was there. When I would see it later on TV, then it became a pit, I thought, that is not even familiar to me. That’s not my experience at the place.

After that, we just started working. There was a guy named Roland Kandle who was in charge of New Jersey’s Critical Incident Stress Team and he was running the show. He was a super guy — highly organized, very effective. He gave everybody a nickname. My nickname was Kentucky, because they couldn’t believe somebody had come from Kentucky and couldn’t believe we actually had a police cruiser there. I got a whole lot of curious looks and strange comments about Lexington, Ky., because nobody recognized it.

You had been in law enforcement for 11 years when the World Trade Center was attacked by terrorists. Was there anything in your career that you feel prepared you for what you saw at Ground Zero?

No. It was completely different. I was only a patrolman for six years before I became chaplain. I saw a few bad fatalities, but certainly not as much as what a traffic unit would work. I was a third-shift patrolman the whole time I was on patrol, and I was downtown. There are fewer fatalities downtown than out in some of the outlying areas. I saw a few shootings. But no. The whole environment was just completely different than anything I had ever >>